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SIPDIS

AF/S FOR B. NEULING
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2010

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SUBJECT: MDC WINS BULAWAYO MAYORAL POLL

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Eric T. Schultz under Section 1.4 b/d

Election Results

1. (U) In an August 13 election, Bulawayo MDC Mayor Japhet Ndabeni-Ncube retained his mayoral seat over ZANU-PF challenger Dickson Solman Abu Basuthu by a margin of 29,575 to 5,509. Barely ten percent of Bulawayo,s 331,447 registered voters cast ballots.

ZESN Observations

2. (C) Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), Information Officer Ellen Kandororo told us on August 16 that ZESN had deployed 17 observers to cover the election. She said they had reported a relatively high proportion of voters having been turned away, usually for being in the wrong ward. Kandororo criticized the GOZ and both parties for failing to conduct adequate voter education for the voters prior to the election. She took each party to task further for the lack of interest each had shown in this election. Kandororo said she ran into a high-ranking MDC official who was unaware of the fact that there was an election in Bulawayo during the weekend.

3. (C) Kandororo said ZESN had enjoyed a good working relationship with GOZ officials throughout the election and commended the Election Supervisory Committee and the Zimbabwe Election Commission for their performance in Bulawayo. Kandororo reported further, however, that two months before the election ZESN had received a letter from the ZEC requesting information about all sources of its funding. She noted that new prohibitions against foreign funding for voter education had prevented ZESN from conducting voter education in this election; the NGO is looking for local sponsors to support such efforts in the future.

Comment

4. (C) This election result says less about the MDC,s stature than it does about Ndabeni-Ncube,s personal popularity in the city and the depth of Ndebele (Zimbabwe,s leading minority tribe, dominant in Matabeleland) resentment of the ruling party. While ZANU-PF has shown itself capable of rigging municipal elections in the past, Bulawayo would have been a bridge too far for a party burdened by many other competing priorities. In any event, ZANU-PF was reluctant to use resources for an election that it believed it would lose. The GOZ will nonetheless continue at every turn to hamstring the city government,s capacity to deliver to constituencies and bring credit to the opposition. The MDC leadership,s inattention to municipal governance, which the opposition controls in most of Zimbabwe,s urban areas, is a long-standing shortcoming.

SCHULTZ